THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The number of pilgrims who visited Kailash-Mansarovar on the pilgrimage organised by the Government of India during the last three years are as follows:

2003	:	316 (Yatra duration was truncated due to SARS epidemic in China)
2004	:	537
2005	:	529

(b) Ministry of External Affairs has spent approximately Rs. 39,00,000/- (Rupees Thirty-nine lakhs) in organizing the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in 2005.

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra is presently organised by the Government under a bilateral arrangement with the Chinese Government through the Lipulekh Pass in Pithoragarh, Uttaranchal. Government pay Rs. 3,250/- (Rupees Three thousand two hundred and fifty) for each pilgrim to Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) for arrangements made by KMVN for the Yatra. In addition, during the course of the Yatra, facilities provided by the Government to the pilgrims include free medical assistance, security and escort cover by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) till the Lipulekh Pass on the Indian side, Communication links with China, and provision of satellite phone to the Liaison Officer for each batch of pilgrims for use during emergency throughout the Yatra. A Liaison Officer is attached by the Government with each batch of pilgrims, who is responsible for their general werlfare.

(c) to (e) Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and Haj are essentially different so far as the number of pilgrims, mode of travel and the nature of terrain are involved. Therefore, there may not be a direct comparison between the two.

Services of lobbyist to push Indian case in USA

1711. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has decided to hire the services of Venable LLP, the lobbyist firm, to push its cases in USA; and

(b) if so, what distinct advantage will accure to India thereof by the engagement of the firm when we have a full fledged comprehensive Indian Embassy in USA supported by three Consulates?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Government has engaged Venable LLP as a lobbyist firm for:

- securing the active support of the U.S. Government, Congress and public opinion for a strong bilateral relationship by projecting India's priorities, policies and viewpoints on issues of global importance like non-proliferation, human rights etc. and disseminating India's economic and political developments and achievements.

- expanding the areas of convergence between the two countries, and

- monitoring analyzing and advising in various legislative measures in U.S. Congress and Senate for implications on India's interests.

(b) Given the steady progress in relations between India and the US in recent times, the engagement of this firm would be of substantial benefit in taking the relationship to a sustained strategic pertnership level.

Talks between India and Pakistan

1712. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:
SHRI JESUDASU SEELAM:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Pakistan had rounds of talks to discuss a host of issues including bus services and aviation agreement between two countries ahead of third round of composite dialouge process scheduled in January next year;

(b) whether two countries have planned about 30 meetings in next three months;

(c) if so, whether any agreement in regard to flights by private airlines have also been agreed upon; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?